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ABSTRACT

This report updates a 1979 article from the Wisconsin Library Bulletin about censorship in Wisconsin from 1966 through 1975. Compiled using data from the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF), the report provides information about censorship attempts and actions between 1976 and 1980. From 1966 through 1975, 49 cases of censorship were reported in Wisconsin; from 1975 through 1980, 14 cases were reported. The decrease is attributed to: (1) authors writing more controversially during the 1966-1975 period; (2) the publishing industry choosing not to publishing as many controversial books during the more conservative 1976-1980 period; and (3) laxity in reporting cases of censorship to the OIF by the forces of intellectual freedom in Wisconsin. Censorship cases were reported in seven cities, with six cases reported in Milwaukee. In educational institutions, censorship cases were most often initiated by parents; in noneducational settings cases were initiated by a variety of figures, including a judge, a city official, and a gallery director. Half of the incidents appeared in primary and secondary schools, with four of the eight occurring in high schools; none were reported by colleges or universities. Noneducational institutions involved in censorship cases were a prison, a library, an art gallery, a magazine, a television station, and a nursing home. The reasons most commonly cited for censorship attacks were obscenity, language, pornography, blasphemy, and conflicts with religious beliefs, although national security was cited in the case of the magazine. Of the 14 cases, two were successful, four were unsuccessful, and the rest were either partially successful or the results were unknown. Seven tables summarize the findings. (SD)

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Are You There God? It's Me, a Censor

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In the July-August 1979 issue of Wisconsin Library Bulletin, an article on censorship in Wisconsin appeared covering the years 1966 through 1975. This is an update of that information, and includes the years 1976 through 1980. Data for this article was obtained from the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, published by the American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF), as was data for the previous article. Therefore, this article does not reflect the total number of censorship cases occurring in the state.

In June 1976, Mrs. Ruth Melnick, a parent of a Greenfield High School student, arranged to have the movie Night at the Sunset shown at her own expense in order that parents and other citizens would have an opportunity to determine if it was an appropriate film for educational use. The film shows "teenage drinking, pot smoking, dirty talk, and sex."[1] In August of 1976, a suit was filed against the Greenfield School Board for permitting the showing of Night at the Sunset in the high school.[2]

In February of 1977, Mr. and Mrs. Ron Moody asked that the book Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret be removed from primary school libraries, saying the book conflicted with their religious beliefs: "The book brings God down to the level of humans and it is unrighteous and contains profanity." A review committee decided the book should be retained.[3]

In April 1978, Edward G. Kocher, Director of the West Bend Gallery of Fine Arts, stated that seventeen of the forty-five works in an art exhibit by Duane Unkefer were considered objectionable for the show because of blatant nudity. The gallery's "Unwritten policy on objectionable works"

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reflects the conservative mood of the community.[4]

Between the years 1966 and 1975, a total of forty-nine cases of censorship were reported by the OIF from the state of Wisconsin. Between the years 1976 and 1980, however, there were only fourteen out of a national total of 857 reported cases. This is low when compared to the 2,178 cases reported between 1966 and 1975. Reasons are unclear. Possibly, because the years 1966-75 were filled with unrest and controversial issues, the writings of a number of people of that era were considered controversial. The liberalism that swept the country in the sixties and early seventies had a profound effect on both writers and readers, and gradually, acceptable norms changed. Another theory could be that toward the mid- to late seventies, the pendulum swung toward more conservative literature, with fewer offensive books and articles published. It is also possible that the forces of intellectual freedom in the state of Wisconsin, (and perhaps some other states) were lax in reporting cases of censorship to the Newsletter.

Table I shows the number of censorship cases reported in Wisconsin by year. The busiest year was 1978. There is no pattern to the way in which the cases are reported during these years.

Table I

Number of Censorship Cases Reported

Year	Educational Institutions	Non-educational Institutions
1976	3	0
1977	1	1
1978	2	2
1979	1	2
1980	1	1

Total:	8	6

Table II lists locations and the number of incidents reported in each.

Table II

Places of Censorship Attacks

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Elkhorn	1	Madison	1
Madison	1	Milwaukee	3
Milwaukee	3	Waukesha	1
Montello	1	West Bend	1
Sun Prairie	1		
Wauzeka	1		

Milwaukee tops the list with six cases reported. This is forty-three percent of the total. Madison reported two, and all the other cities reported only one each. It is not unusual for more heavily populated areas to report more censorship cases than smaller cities and town.

Table III

Sources of Censorship

Educational Institutions	
Parents	6
Acting Director of the Bureau of School Libraries	1
School Superintendent	1
Non-educational Institutions	

Wisconsin Division of Corrections	1
City Official	1
Gallery Director	1
Judge	1
School Teacher	1
Association of Nursing Homes	1

Parents head the list of censorship sponsors in educational institutions. What is surprising is that only one case of censorship was brought about by a school administrator. In the preceding ten years, eight attempts were initiated by them, which was more typical of the national norm. Again, the reader should be reminded that it is possible that there were more, but this article deals only with the cases reported in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom.

Among non-educational institutions, there are no dominating groups of censors. Interestingly, one attempt was initiated by a Milwaukee school teacher, Kathleen Morkin, who collected 700 signatures protesting the showing on local television of Looking For Mr. Goodbar. She did not think that children should see the kind of degrading image depicted of a teacher. The television station director, Stan Marinoff, did not change the scheduled May 18 showing. The ABC affiliate in Rockford, Illinois, however, did cancel the movie.[5]

One case of censorship dealt with national security. United States District Judge Robert W. Warren barred Progressive magazine from publishing "The H-Bomb Secret" by Howard Morland. The article contained information detailing the workings of the most efficient hydrogen bomb available. Another article by Charles Hanson appeared in the Madison Press Connection divulging the same information. Since it was also considered detrimental to national security, the court ruled, using the Hanson article precedent, that the Morland article could also be

published.[6]

Institutions affected by censorship are shown in Table IV. No censorship attempts were reported from any Wisconsin colleges or universities. In the previous ten years, seven such attempts were reported.

Table IV

Institutions Affected by Censorship Attempts

Educational Institutions	
Elementary Schools	1
High Schools	4
All levels (K-12)	3
Non-educational Institutions	
Prison	1
Library	1
Art Gallery	1
Magazine	1
Television Station	1
Nursing Home	1

Most censorship cases in educational institutions occurred in high schools. One resulted in changes in a local school board. In March 1978, a group of parents in Wauzeka wanted a collection of poems removed from a high school library, claiming the work "put sex in the gutter" with its "rotten, vulgar language." The Wauzeka school board voted to retain the collection in the high school library on the recommendation of the review committee which received the complaint.[7] Despite this, Collected Poems was never replaced in the collection. Former board member Dale Bruegman kept the book at his home after he and another board member were defeated

in their bid for re-election. Bruegman reportedly believed that if the book were replaced on library shelves, someone else would take it and burn it. A third board member resigned after the new school board offered School Superintendent Bert Anderson $7,000 to resign. Mr. Anderson was also a supporter of the book. The high school librarian at that time was Mary Jane Sime, who also resigned.[8]

The reasons for censorship attempts are found in Table V. The number one reason is obscenity, followed by offensive language. Nine attacks were related to morality; two dealt with religious beliefs. This is no surprise, since moral values vary.

Table V

Reasons for Censorship Attacks

Educational Institutions	
Obscene	3
Language	2
Pornographic trash	1
Blasphemy	1
Conflicts with religious belief	1
Non-educational Institutions	
Obscene	1
Violates national security	1
Nudity	1
Degrades image of teacher	1
No reason given	2

Table VI gives dispositions of censorship attacks in Wisconsin.

Table VI

Disposition of Censorship Attacks

Educational Institutions

Successful	2
Unsuccessful	4
Partially-successful	1
Not known	2

Only three of fourteen attacks were successful. Half (four out of eight), in educational institutions were unsuccessful. This is surprising, since in the ten previous years, only three of twenty-five were unsuccessful. This is good news to the forces of intellectual freedom, possibly indicating that educators and librarians have been more successful in educating the general population about the dangers of censorship. The partially-successful attempt involved the book Working. A group of parents wanted to ban the book from the high school classroom, but the school board voted to continue its use. Parents could veto its use by their own children.[9] This solution has also been used in other cases throughout the country, but intellectual freedom forces view it as a partial defeat.

Table VII lists materials that were targeted by censors in Wisconsin. Judy Blume's Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret, was cited twice, as was the film Night at the Sunset. All other materials were mentioned only once.

Table VII

Materials Under Censorship Attack

Educational Institutions

Books:

Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret
Collected Poems
Working
American Heritage Dictionary

Film:

Night at the Sunset

Newsletter:

Wisconsin Association of Alcoholism and Other Drug Abuses

Musical Production:

Jesus Christ, Superstar

Non-educational Institutions

Book:

Delta of Venus

Magazine:

Progressive

Film:

Looking For Mr. Goodbar

Newspapers:

Milwaukee Journal
Waupun World

Miscellaneous:

Art exhibit

Conclusion

Censorship and its relationship with the First Amendment is a highly controversial subject which is interpreted in many ways. Feelings differ depending on locale, religious beliefs and any number of other factors. It could be speculated that, as with other social and economic subjects, censorship tends to be cyclical, peaking at times when influential attitudes set boundaries (these boundaries are temporary, but real). Victories by censors in the courts may cause more liberal writers and publishers to "back off" to allow "cooling off" periods. It is during

these periods when controversial ideas and moral and political attitudes are gradually absorbed into the culture, that the number of censorship cases ebb. Once absorbed, new and more shocking ideas are brought forth and examined, with resulting moral and social indignation. This results in renewed censorship attempts.

America entered a period of censorship in the early 1980s. While an earlier period of censorship, the McCarthy era, was concerned with Communism, this movement came from the New Right, including the Moral Majority. Its roots lay in conservative religious dogma, and it was focused on libraries and classrooms.

Librarians were leaders in the fight against McCarthyism in the 1950s. Librarians also fought the censorship attempts of the New Right. Librarians will be fighting for intellectual freedom in the future, it is sure, whether it be in regard to flag burning or the next wave of pornography.

Footnotes

1. Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 25 (September 1976): 126.
2. _____ 25 (November 1976): 152.
3. _____ 26 (May 1977): 84.
4. _____ 27 (July 1978): 99.
5. _____ 29 (September 1980): 108.
6. _____ 28 (September 1979): 108, 126.
7. _____ 27 (July 1978): 97.
8. _____ 28 (January 1979): 6.
9. _____ 27 (September 1978): 123.